

**ARIZONA COMMISSION FOR THE DEAF AND THE HARD OF HEARING
REPLY COMMENTS ON SPEED OF ANSWER REQUIREMENT FOR VRS**

The Arizona Commission for the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing (ACDHH) hereby submits its comments in response to Public Notice, DA No. 05-339, released on February 8, 2005 seeking reply comments on the speed of answer requirement for video relay service (VRS). In its Public Notice the Commission asked whether a speed of answer rule should be adopted for VRS and included a series of questions regarding the specifics of a speed of answer requirement.

Arizona Commission for the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing has the authority to administer and monitor the Arizona Relay Service. Funding for Arizona Relay Service comes from an excise tax charged on landlines within the State of Arizona.

ACDHH is in support of VRS calls being answered in a reasonable period of time; however, ACDHH does recommend enforced ruling at this present time until the shortage of interpreters is addressed.

In specific response from other comments posted on FCC's website, ACDHH provides the following comments:

1. *What should the speed of answer time be for VRS calls? What percentage of VRS calls should be required to be answered within that period of time?*

ACDHH supports the Registry Interpreters for the Deaf's comments posted on FCC's website on February 25, 2005. *"RID supports a standard for speed of answer that would be similar in time and percentage to that of TRS, provided that adequate funding to relay centers in order to ensure adequate numbers and quality of interpreters is available."*

In reference to Sorenson's comments on questions #1 posted on FCC's website on February 25, 2005, *"In Phoenix, for example, where a VRS call center opened recently, complaints from Deaf individuals that they cannot obtain interpreters for business, meetings, medical appointments and other needs have skyrocketed"*.

There was a shortage of interpreters in Arizona before the VRS call center has opened. Since Sorenson opened its call center in Phoenix area, the impact

regarding the shortage of interpreters has increased to what can only be considered a SERIOUS shortage of available interpreters. ACDHH was forced to cancel numerous important meetings due to the non availability of interpreters. In addition, other organizations/providers were not able to provide interpreters for deaf individuals. ACDHH has a mandate to regulate and license interpreters starting September 1, 2007. ACDHH has spent great deal of time and money in an effort to expand training opportunities for future interpreters. Recently Arizona legislators passed a \$750,000 funding bill for a state interpreter training program. Yet ACDHH has seen out of state VRS providers taking advantage of state interpreter training initiatives by hiring interpreters to work in local (within Arizona) call centers that serve clients in locations beyond the State of Arizona. In essence, Arizona is training interpreters to work in Arizona in national and regional call centers that serve populations well beyond the State of Arizona. In short our state is supporting the recruitment and training of interpreters of who are largely not involved in serving the deaf population of Arizona. VRS providers contribute nothing to the state training programs while at the same time hiring the most qualified interpreters. . There have been workshops sponsored by a VRS provider which we believe did not “produce” more sign language interpreters but rather provided nothing other than “maintenance” training skills.

ACDHH strongly encourages the Commission to establish a criterion for VRS providers necessary before opening a new VRS call center at any state. The criteria should include a specific number of NAD/RID certified interpreters to be used, and the number of hours of each interpreter will be utilized within a 24 hour period. Based on the numbers of interpreters used for VRS call center the VRS provider shall give a percentage of call centers billing to support local and state interpreter training programs.

A sample formula could be used: 50 interpreters used in 24 hours x 4 hours (each interpreters work 4 hr) = 200 hours. 200hrs x \$38.00 (interpreters hourly rate) = \$7,600. \$7,600 x 365 days = \$2,774,000. \$2,774,000 x .05% = \$138,700 shall be given to the state interpreter training program.

2. When should a particular speed of answer rule be effective? Should VRS speed of answer standards be phased in over time? If so, how should the standards be phased in (i.e., what standards should apply at what points in time)?

ACDHH recommends that the speed of answer standards be phased in over one year of time. Before ruling such standard ACDHH suggests the Commission implement a better method of data collection to determine an appropriate measurement on the speed of answer time.

3. *What should be the starting and ending point for measuring speed of answer?*

See comments in #2.

4. *How should “abandoned” calls be treated in determining a provider’s compliance with the speed of answer standard?*

Once the speed of answer standard is in place ACDHH suggests the abandoned calls be treated the same as TRS calls.

5. *How should “call backs” – i.e., calls where the consumer elects to have the provider call the consumer back when a VRS CA becomes available to place the call, rather than have the consumer wait for the next available CA – be treated in the speed of answer calculation? Should for example, such “call backs” be treated as abandoned calls? Should such “call backs” be prohibited once a speed of answer rule is adopted for VRS?*

ACDHH supports VRS providers treating all calls the same as TRS calls once speed of answer standard is determined.

6. *Should a provider’s compliance with a speed answer rule be measured on a daily or monthly basis? Or should it be measured on some other basis?*

ACDHH recommends the Commission consider collecting data on a daily basis to measure the speed of answer before determining such standards for VRS calls.

7. *In connection with the adoption of a speed of answer requirement for VRS, should providers be required to submit reports to the Commission detailing call data reflecting their compliance with the speed of answer rule, and if so, how frequently should such reports be filed (e.g., monthly, quarterly or semi-annually)?*

ACDHH recommends VRS providers submit reports on a monthly basis to the Commission.

In conclusion, ACDHH would like to emphasize to the Commission the severity of the impact on the Deaf community caused by the shortage of qualified interpreters across the United States. The shortage of interpreters has had a damaging impact on the Deaf community where VRS call centers are located such as in Arizona. If you live in the same metropolitan area as a VRS center, it is a fact that you are going to have a measure of difficulty

finding a good, qualified interpreter within a reasonable amount of time. In the Phoenix, Arizona metropolitan area that means deaf people are often not going to be able to find qualified interpreters available for doctors appointments, educational appointments, hospital emergencies, family reunions, parent/teacher meetings and just about any situation you might imagine. If the Commission determines to rule a speed answer time shortly, the VRS providers will be forced to hire “non-certified” interpreters, which will have a significant impact in the Deaf community by leaving them with “almost” no interpreters available for the community. ACDHH asks the Commission to take a step back and re-visit the shortage of interpreters carefully before ruling on speed answer standard for VRS calls. ACDHH suggests the Commission establish a VRS Task Force to work with stakeholders and providers to address this vital issue.

Respectfully submitted,

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March 4, 2005